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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

28 April 1965

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Dear Mr. President:

I remain concerned, as I have said before to you, Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara, over the limited scale of air action against North Vietnam which we envision for the next few months.

Specifically I feel that we must conduct our bombing attacks in a manner that will begin to hurt North Vietnam badly enough to cause the Hanoi regime to seek a political way out through negotiation rather than expose their economy to increasingly serious levels of destruction. By limiting our attacks to targets like bridges, military installations and lines of communication, in effect we signal to the Communists that our determination to win is significantly modified by our fear of widening the war.

In these circumstances the Communists are likely to feel they can afford to accept a considerable amount of bomb damage while they improve their air defenses and step up their insurgency in South Vietnam. If they take this line of action, in the next few months they can present us with an ever-increasing guerrilla war against the reinforced Viet Cong in terrain and circumstances favorable to the Communists.

If this situation develops and lasts several months or more, I feel world opinion will turn against us, Communist propaganda will become increasingly effective, and indeed domestic support of our policy may erode.

I therefore urge that as we deploy additional troops, which I believe necessary, we concurrently hit the north harder and inflict greater damage. In my opinion, we

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should strike their petroleum supplies, electric power installations, and air defense installations (including the SAM sites which are now being built). I do not think we have to fear taking on the MIG's, which after all the ChiNats defeated in 1958 with F-86's and Sidewinders.

I am not talking about bombing centers of population or killing innocent people, though there will of course be some casualties. I am proposing to "tighten the tourniquet" on North Vietnam so as to make the Communists pause to weigh the losses they are taking against their prospects for gains. We should make it hard for the Viet Cong to win in the south and simultaneously hard for Hanoi to endure our attacks in the north.

I believe this course of action holds out the greatest promise we can hope for in our effort to attain our ultimate objective of finding a political solution to the Vietnam problem. This view follows logically, it seems to me, from our National Intelligence Estimate of 18 February 1965, which concludes that the Hanoi regime would be more likely than not to make an effort to "secure a respite" by some political move when and if, but not before, a sustained U.S. program of air attacks is damaging important economic or military assets in North Vietnam.

I attach a copy of my memorandum of April 2nd, which may not have come to your attention, since it argues this case in a little more detail.

Respectfully yours,

John A. McCone

Attachment

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C.

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

2 April 1965

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
Special Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor

I have been giving thought to the paper that we discussed in yesterday's meeting, which unfortunately I had little time to study, and also to the decision made to change the mission of our ground forces in South Vietnam from one of advice and static defense to one of active combat operations against the Viet Cong guerrillas.

I feel that the latter decision is correct only if our air strikes against the North are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the North Vietnamese. The paper we examined yesterday does not anticipate the type of air operation against the North necessary to force the NVN to reappraise their policy. On the contrary, it states, "We should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations ----," and later, in outlining the types of targets, states, "The target systems should continue to avoid the effective GCI range of MIG's," and these conditions indicate restraints which will not be persuasive to the NVN and would probably be read as evidence of a U.S. desire to temporize.

I have reported that the strikes to date have not caused a change in the North Vietnamese policy of directing Viet Cong insurgency, infiltrating cadres and supplying material. If anything, the strikes to date have hardened their attitude.

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I have now had a chance to examine the 12-week program referred to by General Wheeler and it is my personal opinion that this program is not sufficiently severe or damaging to the North Vietnamese to cause them to compromise their present policy.

On the other hand, we must look with care to our position under a program of slowly ascending tempo of air strikes. With the passage of each day and each week, we can expect increasing pressure to stop the bombing. This will come from various elements of the American public, from the press, the United Nations and world opinion. Therefore time will run against us in this operation and I think the North Vietnamese are counting on this.

Therefore I think what we are doing is starting on a track which involves ground force operations which, in all probability, will have limited effectiveness against guerrillas, although admittedly will restrain some VC advances. However, we can expect requirements for an ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chances of victory. I support and agree with this decision but I must point out that in my judgment, forcing submission of the VC can only be brought about by a decision in Hanoi. Since the contemplated actions against the North are modest in scale, they will not impose unacceptable damage on it, nor will they threaten the DRV's vital interests. Hence, they will not present them with a situation with which they cannot live, though such actions will cause the DRV pain and inconvenience.

I believe our proposed track offers great danger of simply encouraging Chinese Communist and Soviet support of the DRV and VC cause if for no other reason than the risk for both will be minimum. I envision that the reaction of the NVN and Chinese Communists will be to deliberately, carefully, and probably gradually, build up the Viet Cong capabilities by covert infiltration of North Vietnamese and, possibly, Chinese cadres and thus bring an ever-increasing pressure on our forces. In effect,

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we will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves.

Therefore it is my judgment that if we are to change the mission of the ground forces, we must also change the ground rules of the strikes against North Vietnam. We must hit them harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage. Instead of avoiding the MIG's, we must go in and take them out. A bridge here and there will not do the job. We must strike their air fields, their petroleum resources, power stations and their military compounds. This, in my opinion, must be done promptly and with minimum restraint..

If we are unwilling to take this kind of a decision now, we must not take the actions concerning the mission of our ground forces for the reasons I have mentioned above.

JOHN A. McCONE

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Orig - hand-carried by Mr. McCone to the President on 4/29/65

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